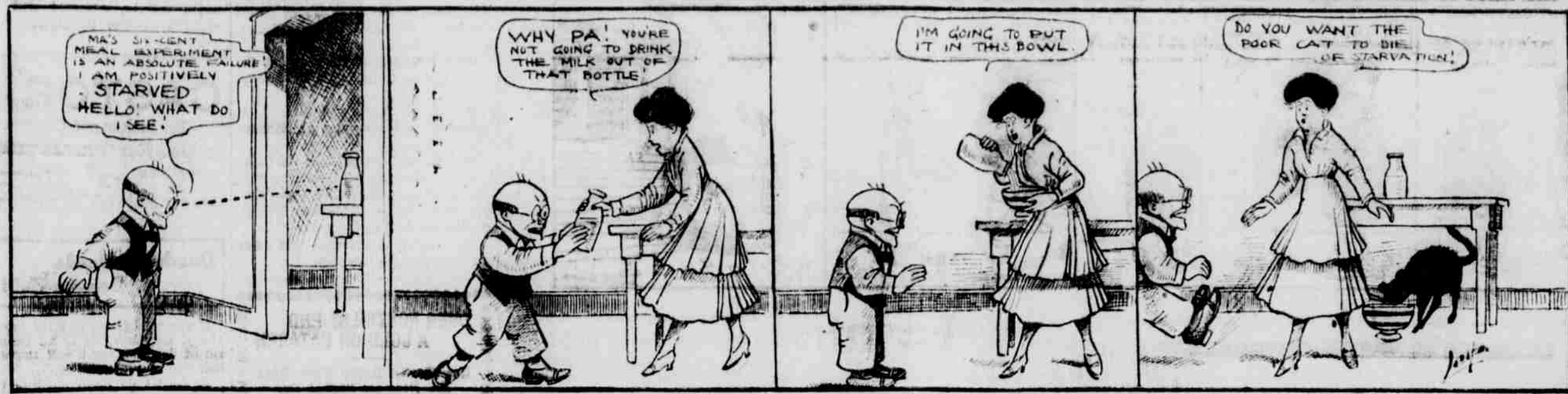


DOINGS OF THE VAN LOONS



At that Mother doesn't lack consideration of some one

KING--of THE KHYBER RIFLES

A Romance of Adventure
by TALBOT MUNDY

CHAPTER I.

The men who govern India—more power to them and her!—are few. Those who stand in their way and pretend to help them with a flood of words are a host. The charge has been the light in print that India—well-spring of plague and sudden death and money lenders—has sold her soul to twenty succeeding conquerors in turn.

So when the world war broke the world was destined to be surprised on India's account. The Red sea, full of rifling transports crowded with dark-skinned gentlemen, whose one prayer was that the war might not be over before they should have struck a blow for Britain, was the Indian army's answer to the press.

More than one nation was deeply shocked by India's answer to "practices" that had extended over years. But there were men in India who learned to love India long ago with that love that casts out fear, who knew exactly what was going to happen and could therefore afford to wait for orders instead of running round in rings. Athelstan King, for instance, nothing yet but a captain unattached, sat in meagerly furnished quarters with his heels on a table. He is not a doctor, yet he read a book on surgery; and when he went over to the club he carried the book under his arm and continued to read it there. In the other room where the telegraph blanks were littered in confusion all about the floor, the other officers sent telegrams and forgot King, who sat and smoked and read about surgery; and before he had nearly finished one

King grunted with the lids half-lowered over full, dark eyes. He did not look especially handsome in that attitude. Some men swear he looks like a Roman, and others liken him to a garzole, all of them choosing to ignore the smile that can transform his whole face instantly.

"We're denuding India of troops—not keeping back more than a mere handful to hold the tribes in check," King nodded. There has never been peace along the northwest border. It did not need vision to foresee trouble from that quarter. In fact it must have been partly on the strength of some of King's reports that the general was planning now.

"Well, the tribes'll know presently how many men we're sending overseas. There've been rumors about Khinjan by the hundred lately. They're cooking something. Can you imagine 'em keeping quiet now?"

"That depends, sir. Yes, I can imagine it."

The general laughed. "That's why I sent for you. I need a man with imagination! There's a woman you've got to work with on this occasion who can imagine a shade or two too much. What's worse, she's ambitious. So I chose you to work with her."

King's lips stiffened under his mustache, and the corners of his eyes wrinkled into crow's feet to correspond. Eyes are never coal-black, of course, but his looked it at that minute.

"You know we've sent men to Khinjan who are said to have entered the caves. Not one of 'em has ever returned."

King frowned.

"She claims she can enter the caves and come out again at pleasure. She has offered to do it, and I have accepted. Can you guess who she is?"

"Not Yasmin!" King hazarded, and the general nodded. The helmet-strap mark, printed indelibly on King's jaw and cheek by the Indian sun, tightened and grew whiter—as the general noted out of the corner of his eye.

"Know her?"

"Know of her, of course, sir. Everybody does. Never met her to my knowledge."

"Um-m-m! Whose fault was that? Somebody ought to have seen to that. Go to Delhi now and meet her. I'll send her a wire to say you're coming. She knows I've chosen you. She tried to insist on full discretion, but I overruled her."

King's tongue licked his lips, and his eyes wrinkled. The general's voice became the least shade more authoritative.

"When you see her, get a pass from her that'll take you into Khinjan caves! Ask her for it! For the sake of appearances I'll gazette you seconded to the Khyber rifles. For the sake of success, get a pass from her!"

"Very well, sir."

"You're a brother in the Khyber rifles, haven't you? Was it you or your brother who visited Khinjan once and sent in a report?"

"I did, sir."

He spoke without pride. Even the brigade of British-Indian cavalry that went to Khinjan on the strength of his report and leveled its defenses with the ground, had not been able to find the famous caves. Yet the caves themselves are a byword.

"There's talk of a jihad (holy war). There's worse than that! When you went to Khinjan, what was your chief object?"

"To find the source of the everlasting rumors about the so-called 'Heart of the Hills', sir."

"Yes, yes, I remember. I read your report. You didn't find anything, did you? Well, the story is now that the 'Heart of the Hills' has come to life. So the spies say."

King whistled softly.

"There's no guessing what it means," said the general. "Go and work with Yasmin. The spies keep bringing in rumors of ten thousand men in Khinjan caves, and of another large lashkar not far away from Khinjan. There must be no jihad, King! India is all but defenseless! This story about a 'Heart of the Hills' coming to life may presage unity of action and a holy war such as the world has

not seen. Go up there and stop it if you can. At least, let me know the facts."

King grunted. To stop a holy war single handed would be rather like stopping the wind—possibly easy enough, if one knew the way. Yet he knew no general would throw away a man like himself on a useless venture. He began to look happy.

The general clucked to the mare and one wheel ceased to touch the gravel as they whirled along a semi-circular drive. Under the porch of a pretentious residence, sentries saluted, the sails swung down and in less than sixty seconds King was following the general through a wide entrance into a crowded hall. The instant the general's fat figure darkened the doorway twenty men of higher rank than King, native and English, rose from lined-up chairs and pressed forward.

"Sorry—have to keep you all waiting—busy!" He waved them aside with a little apologetic gesture. "Come in here, King."

King followed him through a door that slammed tight behind him on rubber jambs.

"Sit down."

The general unlocked a steel drawer and began to rummage among the papers in it. In a minute he produced a package, bound in rubber bands, with a faded photograph face upward on the top.

"That's the woman! How do you like the look of her?"

King took the package and for a minute stared hard at the likeness of a woman whose fame has traveled up and down India, until her witchery has become a proverb. She was dressed as a dancing woman, yet very few dancing women could afford to be dressed as she was.

The general watched his face with eyes that missed nothing.

"Remember—I said work with her!"

King looked up and nodded.

"They say she's three parts Russian," said the general. "To my knowledge she speaks Russian like a native, and about twenty other tongues as well, including English. She was the girl widow of a rascally hill rajah. I've heard she loved her rajah. And

any one who watched him—and there was at least one man who did—must have noticed his strange ability, almost like that of water, to reach the point he aimed for, through and around, the crowd."

He neither shivered nor argued. Orders and blows would have been equally useless, for he had tried the crowd could not have obeyed, and it was in no mind to try. Without the least apparent effort he arrived—and there is no other word that quite describes it—

he arrived. He climbed into his carriage and leaned from the window.

"Why are you here?" asked an acid voice behind him; and without troubling to turn his head, he knew that Major Hyde was to be his carriage mate again.

"Orders," said King.

"Is that your answer?" asked the major. Blinked ambition in an ugly glow to ride. He had tried for a command but had been shelved.

"I have sufficient authority," said King, unruffled. He spoke as if he were thinking of something entirely different. His eyes were as if they saw the major from a very long way off and rather approved of him on the whole.

"Show me your authority, please!"

King dived into an inner pocket and produced a card that had about ten words written on its face, above a general's signature. Hyde read it and passed it back.

"So you're one of those, are you?" he said in a tone of voice that would start a fight in some parts of the world and in some services. But King nodded cheerfully, and that annoyed the major more than ever; he snorted, closed his mouth with a snap and turned to rearrange the sheet and pillow on his berth.

"That's the Woman! How Do You Like the Look of Her?"

I've heard she didn't! There's another story that she poisoned him. I know she got away with his money—and that's proof enough of brains! Some say she's a she-devil. I think that's an exaggeration, but bear in mind she's dangerous!"

King grinned. A man who trusts Eastern women over readily does not rise far in the secret service.

"If you've got nous enough to keep on her soft side and use her—not let her use you—you can keep the 'Hills' quiet and the Khyber safe! If you can contrive that—now—in this pinch—there's no limit for you! Commander in chief shall be your job before you're sixty!"

King pocketed the photograph and papers. "I'm well enough content, sir, as things are," he said quietly.

The general paced once across the room and once back again, with hands behind him. Then he stopped in front of King.

"No man in India has a stiffer task than you have now! A jihad launched from the 'Hills' would mean anarchy in the plains. That would entail sending back from France an army that can't be spared. There must be no jihad, King! There must—not—be—one! Keep that in your head!"

"What arrangements have been made with her, sir?"

"Practically none! She's watching the spies in Delhi, but they're likely to break for the 'Hills' any minute. Then they'll be arrested. When that happens the fate of India may be in

your hands and hers! Get out of my way now, until fifteen minutes!"

In a way that some men never learn, King proceeded to efface himself entirely among the crowd in the hall, contriving to say nothing of any account to anybody until the great going boomed and the general led them all in to his long dining table. Yet he did not look furtive or secretive. Nobody noticed him, and he noticed everybody. There is nothing whatever secretive about that.

The fare was plain, and the meal a perfunctory affair. The general and his guests were there for no other reason than to eat food, and only the man who happened to seat himself next to King—a major by the name of Hyde—spoke to him at all.

"Why aren't you with your regiment?" he asked.

"Because the general asked me to lunch, sir."

"I suppose you've been pestering him for an appointment?"

King, with his mouth full of curry, did not answer, but his eyes smiled.

After lunch he was closeted with the general again for twenty minutes. Then one of the general's carriages took him to the station; and it did not appear to trouble him at all that the other occupant of the carriage was the self-same Major Hyde who had sat next him at lunch. In fact, he smiled so pleasantly that Hyde grew exasperated. Neither of them spoke. At the station Hyde lost his temper openly, and King left him abusing an unhappy native servant.

The station was crammed to suffocation by a crowd that roared and writhed and smelt to high heaven. But the general himself had telephoned for King's reservation, so he took his time. There were din and stink and dust beneath a savage sun, shaken into reverberations by the scream of an engine's safety valve. It was Indian in essence and awake!—India arising out of lethargy!—India as she is more often nowadays—and it made King, for the time being of the Khyber rifles, happier than some other men can be in ballrooms.

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FINAL SETTLEMENT.

George P. Hills, Attorney.
Estate of WILLIAM R. MAXWELL, deceased.

Notice is hereby given to all persons interested in said estate, that the undersigned, administrator of the estate of said William R. Maxwell, deceased, will appear before the Probate Court of the County of La Salle and State of Illinois, at the County Court House, in Ottawa, in said county, on Monday, the 10th day of December, A. D. 1917, for the purpose of rendering an account of his proceedings in the administration of said estate for the final settlement, when and where any and all persons interested may appear and show cause, if any there be, why such account should not be approved by the Court. Dated at Ottawa, this 26th day of October, 1917.

CHARLES E. HOOK,
Administrator.
EDWARD G. ZHIL,
Clerk Probate Court, La Salle County, Illinois.

NOTICE TO PROVE CLAIMS.

James J. Conway, Attorney.
Estate of BRIDGET DOUGHERTY, deceased.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned, administratrix of the estate of Bridget Dougherty, late of the county of La Salle and state of Illinois, deceased, will appear before the Probate Court of said county, on the first Monday (being the 7th day) of January, 1918, at the Probate Court room, in Ottawa, in said county, when and where all persons having claims or demands against said estate are notified to attend and present the same in writing for adjustment. Dated the 5th day of November, A. D. 1917.

ELIZABETH PELLOUCHOUD,
Administratrix.

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Cars arrive from the west at 1:00 a. m., 8:15 a. m., 12:50 p. m., 6:50 p. m., 11:35 p. m.

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A. M.—5:10a, 5:50c, 6:50d, 8:30c, 9:50c, 10:50d, 11:50c. P. M.—1:50c, 3:50c, 4:50d, 5:50c, 7:50c, 9:50c, 11:00f.

Cars arrive from east at 8:50g p. m., 12:42 a. m.

Southbound.

Southbound cars leave Ottawa station for McKinley Park, Grano Ridge and Streator, Ill.

A. M.—5:50, 6:50h, 7:50, 9:50, 11:50. P. M.—1:50, 3:50, 5:50, 9:00, 11:35.

a Marseilles and intermediate points. b Marseilles, Morris, Seneca and intermediate points. c Princeton and intermediate points. d Ladd and intermediate points